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# QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT APRIL 1 – JUNE 30, 2015

## Countering Violent Extremism in the Middle East & North Africa (CoVE-MENA)

**July 31, 2015**

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**QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE  
REPORT NO. 3  
APRIL 1 – JUNE 30, 2015  
Countering Violent Extremism in the  
Middle East & North Africa  
(CoVE-MENA) Task Order (TO)**

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## List of Acronyms & Abbreviations

CoP	Community of Practice
CoVE-MENA	Countering Violent Extremism in the Middle East and North Africa
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
CSO	Civil Society Organization
Daesh	al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham
DOD	United States Department of Defense
DOS	United States Department of State
FOG	Fixed Obligation Grant
GCTF	Global Counter Terrorism Forum
GCERF	Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund
IS	Islamic State
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MSU	Monthly Status Update
OTI	USAID Office of Transition Initiatives
Q2	Quarter Two
Q3	Quarter Three
Q4	Quarter Four
RFA	Request for Application
SOW	Scope of Work
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USAID/ME/TS	USAID Middle East Bureau, Office of Technical Services
USAID/W	USAID/Washington
USIP	US Institute of Peace
VE	Violent Extremism
VEO	Violent Extremist Organization
VE/I	Violent Extremism and Insurgency

## I. Introduction

This third Quarterly Performance Report for the Countering Violent Extremism in the Middle East and North Africa (CoVE-MENA) Task Order covers the period 1 April to 30 June 2015 (known hereafter as Q3). Highlights from the reporting period include:

- **Research:** The study on women and violent extremism in the MENA region was launched at the beginning of the quarter and the initial draft of the report was submitted to USAID at the end of Q3.
- **Training:** Q3 saw the culmination of many months of preparation in the delivery of CoVE-MENA's first CVE training workshop, "Advancing the Development Response to Violent Extremism in MENA: USAID's Role, Tools, and Options" in Cyprus on June 8-11, 2015. The training was attended by 18 USAID participants and nine United States Government (USG) interagency staff.
- **Maghreb/Sahel Pilot:** The details of the first workshop for the Maghreb/Sahel pilot were jointly determined by USAID and CoVE-MENA, and Salam Institute was selected as a sub-contractor to support the design and facilitation of the workshop. The team developed the workshop agenda and identified and shortlisted potential CSO participants from the Maghreb and Sahel.

## II. CVE Context in MENA

As in Q2, the threat of violent extremism remains high in the MENA region in general; it ranges from a moderate risk in some areas, to continued control of territory in Iraq and Syria (and increasingly Libya) by the extremist group calling themselves the Islamic State (IS), and known in the region and to CoVE-MENA as *Daesh*.

The following are some insights and takeaways shared by participants in the "Advancing the Development Response to Violent Extremism in MENA: USAID's Roles, Tools, and Options" workshop convened by CoVE-MENA in Nicosia, Cyprus from June 8-11, 2015.<sup>1</sup> Participants included 16 Mission staff, four staff from DOD, five from DOS, and two from USAID/DCHA/OTI (for a total of 27 USG). Four USAID/Washington staff attended the workshop as co-facilitators. The overall goals of the workshop were to demystify CVE, provide principles for CVE assessment and programming, and provide a platform for networking and future collaboration.

A full "Key Insights and Takeaways" document was developed from the workshop and submitted to USAID on June 30, 2015. This document incorporates some of the top-line themes from plenary discussions and small-group readouts throughout the workshop. The following topline points are excerpted from the "Key Insights and Takeaways" document:

- Extremist ideology – not religion – should be our frame of reference for the ideological component of VE. This can take many different forms. At the same time, we don't want to overemphasize the role of ideology; it serves to legitimize (within the group) but

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<sup>1</sup> These insights and takeaways are also noted in CoVE-MENA's June 2015 Monthly Status Update.

doesn't explain violent extremism. Many extremists do not adhere to the group ideology and are motivated by some other factor, including in the recruitment phase.

- Many people join these groups without buying into any of the philosophy or ideology. For example, some may have traveled from other Levantine states to join the Free Syrian Army early on in the conflict in order to take down Assad, but when the FSA weakened they joined *Daesh* (still with the purpose of taking down the regime).
- The question of who is/is not an extremist, or even a VEO, is a very complicated one on the ground. Some groups seen as terrorist organizations by the USG (Hamas; Hezbollah) are perceived to be legitimate political parties and social actors by locals. This disconnect can hamper work at times.
- Key insights from counter-gang programming in LAC can and should be transferred to MENA and other CVE programming – this is an excellent opportunity for thought leadership and value-for-dollar innovation.

Drivers of violent extremism specific to each country were identified and are described in the full conference report (Annex I). In response specifically to the question of "what's new" since the publication of the USAID Drivers Guide, the following new and/or MENA-specific drivers of VE were identified in the workshop:

- Online pull factors: The most rapidly evolving aspect of the drivers of VE are the online pull factors, including social media and self-radicalization. Technology is an accelerant. (For example, in some cases, people join or state their alignment with *Daesh* because they get glory/admiration from their peers on Facebook and other social media.)
- International actors' support of local conflict: The international community has played a role in fueling and funding local conflict which has, in turn, contributed to VE.
- VEO operational success: Another key driver is operational success (for *Daesh* specifically).
- Labor migration (from Central Asia VE assessments): Because of marginalization of Central Asians in Russia, many are radicalized in/after return from Russia to Central Asian states, and then they head to Syria.
- Perception of injustice, and lack of access to justice and to the justice sector, is a recurring driver of violence in the MENA region.
- Other observations:
  - At this point, people often join for reasons that are personal and localized: self-defense, defense of property or livelihood, personal connections and networks, etc.
  - People may join *Daesh* for entirely different reasons than they would join an *in situ* (domestic) VE group: from adventure, the desire to "matter," and other non-ideological reasons on one hand, to the misguided ideology of *Daesh* as a state-building organization on the other hand.

### **III. Task Order Management and Coordination**

*Personnel:* During the reporting period, FHI 360 received approval to hire Ms. Loubna Rais for the Morocco-based Program Specialist position. Ms. Rais was originally selected for the position in Q2 but was unavailable for the target start date. Her initial contract, commencing on July 22<sup>nd</sup>, is for an eight month period with the option to extend depending on the plans for future phases of the Maghreb/Sahel pilot, and other CoVE-MENA pilots. In addition, FHI 360 had two new hires for the CoVE-MENA team in Q3: Jeremy Worthington replaced Nasiba Mekhmankulova as a Finance Officer in late April, and Anoma Bhat started as an intern supporting the CoVE-MENA pilot workshop preparations on June 15.

*Contractual Issues:* CoVE-MENA did not raise any contractual issues with USAID this quarter. One pending issue is the determination of Grants Under Contract (GUC) authority for the Task Order.

*Coordination with USAID:* Throughout Q3, there was a significant amount of coordination with USAID around the training component of CoVE-MENA specifically. Since this was the first time a training on CVE was held for a regional, Interagency audience, CoVE-MENA worked very closely with USAID to tailor each session – in many cases, co-creating sections from scratch, such as the Day Three sessions focusing on the interrelationship between violent extremism and other development sectors (economic growth, education, gender, youth, and democracy & governance). These meetings took place over the phone, and also for two full days in person (in Washington, DC, and Nicosia, Cyprus).

A productive quarterly review and coordination meeting was held at USAID on May 8, 2015. Other coordination in Q3 proceeded via regular phone meetings and emails specific to the various aspects of CoVE-MENA (research, training, and pilots).

*Coordination with other agencies:* Nine total representatives from the Department of State and Department of Defense were full participants in the June 8-11, 2015, workshop in Cyprus. The training, therefore, served also as a forum for Interagency discussion around CVE. In early June, CoVE-MENA also consulted with and received feedback from USIP, GCERF, and Hedayah on the general concept for the Maghreb/Sahel pilot workshop.

Representatives from CoVE-MENA attended USIP's forum on April 14, 2015: "A Different Route to Countering Violent Extremism: What Works?." CoVE-MENA team members also participated in the 2015 Alliance for Peacebuilding annual conference (May 13-15, 2015) and engaged with other practitioners and thought leaders on CVE-relevant topics such as youth and conflict, radicalization, local level peacebuilding, and conflict analysis.

### **IV. Task Order Activities**

#### **Research Studies**

Early in the reporting period, Dr. Laura Sjoberg was selected as the Principal Investigator for CoVE-MENA's study on Women and VE. Dr. Sjoberg, an Associate Professor at the University

of Florida, has extensive experience and expertise in researching gender, women, and conflict issues. In addition to publishing widely in academic journals, Dr. Sjoberg has also developed policy reports and consulted for UNFPA and USIP.

With USAID input, COVE-MENA finalized the scope of work (SOW) for the study in early April and completed a detailed work plan outlining tasks, deliverables and deadlines for the project between April and August 2015, when the report will be finalized. In April 2015, the research team, managed by Mercy Corps, began activities in earnest to complete this study, including compiling a list of key informants, experts and resources, and testing how to use ForSight (a social media analytical tool designed by Crimson Hexagon) to answer the research questions.

On April 28<sup>th</sup> the research study team met with USAID to discuss the study's SOW and to select two case studies (Tunisia and Jordan) for the research. Tunisia and Jordan were selected for a number of reasons, including their being USAID presences countries, having access to expert knowledge and data, variation between cases (specifically in gender equality and social dynamics), local VEOs and foreign fighter dynamics, and the possibility of incorporating recommendations into USAID programs.

In May 2015, CoVE-MENA developed the interview protocols and began interviews. Throughout Q3, the research team interviewed a total of 27 key informants spanning a wide range of roles and across several different countries, all with expertise on women and violent extremism.

A draft outline of the paper was submitted to USAID on May 18. The research team received feedback on it (May 27) and was asked to make some modifications. The outline was revised and sent to USAID (May 29) for further input.

A two-page summary of key findings from the key informant interviews was submitted to USAID on June 10. Since the interviews were the primary sources of data on the subject, this summary was meant to give an overview of how the report would be framed and what it would reveal. USAID provided feedback on the summary of key findings on June 17 and the research study team then had a call with USAID to discuss this feedback in detail.

The first complete draft of the paper was submitted to the USAID in early July (Q4). The report will be finalized in Q4, and details on the substance of the report will be included in the next QPR, once USAID approvals are given on the final product.

Also in late April 2015, CoVE-MENA submitted a concept note for a potential study researching community resilience to violent extremism in Iraq. After several meetings with USAID staff in Washington and iterations of the concept note, USAID/Iraq staff ultimately declined the research in June 2015. Plans for a second research study will resume early in Q4.

### ***Training and Knowledge Generation***

The first USAID workshop on CVE programming in the MENA region was implemented by CoVE-MENA during this reporting period. The four-day "Advancing the Development Response to Violent Extremism in MENA: USAID's Role, Tools, and Options" was held in Cyprus on June 8-



11, 2015. In addition to the four USAID co-facilitators,<sup>2</sup> twenty-four participants from USAID and seven United States Government (USG) interagency staff attended the workshop. Together with USAID/ME/TS, CoVE-MENA facilitated the workshop, aiming to:

- De-mystify CVE;
- Build a shared understanding of the roles of development assistance and tools for CVE programming;
- Build a shared regional vision and key tangible actions for CVE in the region;
- Promote collaboration between Missions, posts and the USG interagency (IA); and
- Identify key next steps for individuals.

*Workshop preparations:* In April and May 2015, CoVE-MENA prepared and finalized logistics for the workshop and also developed the following training materials (mostly in May 2015):

- Pre-workshop Survey
- Survey analytics
- Welcome packets
- Registration Form
- Participant Analysis
- Workshop Session PowerPoint Presentations
- Briefing Book (hard copies and extended e-versions)
- Glossary of CVE Terms
- Watani Case Study
- Orientation packet for participants
- Forms and Templates for group activities
- Training Evaluation Forms (daily and summary)

In terms of content development, a Google Drive folder was created in late April to store documents related to the training, including registration form, agenda, slides, briefing book contents, etc. This Drive folder was an efficient way to ensure all parties had access to the most current drafts of content as it was being developed, and it emerged as a best practice that CoVE-MENA will use in the future.

A teleconference on the training agenda was held on April 30 with participation from USAID and CoVE-MENA. On May 15, CoVE-MENA and USAID held an all-day review session of the agenda where the different sessions were discussed and changes were determined. CoVE-MENA revised the agenda based on the comments and coordinated with USAID to continue developing different parts of it. Throughout May, CoVE-MENA worked closely with the USAID team and other cross-sectoral experts to develop content for the presentations, especially those for the morning of Day Three. Related meetings and conversations included:

- Call with Aly Jetha from Big Bad Boo on the Education session (May 21).
- Meeting with Lara Goldmark and John Lindsay (FHI 360) and Bill Baldrige (USAID) on the Education and Economic Growth sessions (May 22).
- Meeting with Kristin Brady and Andy Fine (FHI 360) and Rachel Goldberg (USAID) on youth session (May 26).

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<sup>2</sup> April Hahn (ME/TS), David Hunsicker (DCHA), Dara Katz (DCHA), and Rachel Goldberg (ME/TS).

Finally, USAID and CoVE-MENA held a dry run of the Day Three presentations on May 29.

At the conclusion of the workshop, per requests from workshop participants, USAID/ME/TS and CoVE-MENA set up an online Community of Practice (CoP) for workshop participants to use to access important, relevant CVE documents and to continue communicating/collaborating with each other across the region.

On June 30<sup>th</sup> the CoVE-MENA team, including SSG Advisors, met with USAID/ME to discuss lessons learned, key takeaways, and next steps. CoVE-MENA submitted a document covering key insights and takeaways from the workshop, which was posted to Google Drive for USAID edits and use. The workshop report (found in Annex I) was submitted early in Q4, three weeks after the completion of the workshop.

*Workshop Evaluation:* Participants gave high overall ratings of the workshop in their evaluations. On a scale of one (low) to five (high), the average participant rating in response to the following four questions on the overall training were:

- Was the workshop useful? **4.26**
- Do you feel you have a better understanding of CVE? **4.27**
- Do you feel you have a good vision of CVE in MENA context? **4.12**
- Do you feel you have an action plan for implementing CVE in your work? **4.34**

### ***Maghreb/Sahel Pilot Activity***

During the reporting period, CoVE-MENA continued its research and consultations to inform the anticipated Maghreb-Sahel pilot project and, in late May, USAID gave the team the green light to proceed with planning for an initial CVE workshop for CSOs from the sub-region.

*Consultations and preliminary preparations:* Prior to receiving the green light, USAID carried out consultations with USAID missions and other USG stakeholders in the Maghreb and Sahel countries. During the reporting period, CoVE-MENA participated in a USAID/ME/TS initiated call with USAID/Morocco and Embassy-Rabat to discuss the plan for the pilot, with activities mainly based in Morocco. The CoVE-MENA team also developed, and continuously updated, a database of organizations, initiatives and experts with experience in CVE and CVE-relevant areas whose activities and expertise can be leveraged throughout the pilot activities. Furthermore, team members initiated conversations with several organizations and experts including with Mark Clark and Nabila Hussein from Generations for Peace – a Jordan-based global peacebuilding organization that operates in several MENA countries including Maghreb countries; and Amy Cunningham from GCERF to discuss their respective work and opportunities for collaboration on the pilot (May 25).

CoVE-MENA continued collecting information on VE dynamics, at-risk groups and regions and CSOs in target countries for its internal use and to inform its activities and engagement with these countries. As part of this effort, working documents were developed for Morocco, Niger, Mali and Tunisia, and information on at-risk geographic regions, active CSOs and experts to consult with were collected for the remaining pilot countries, namely Algeria and Libya.

Based on a five-page project description of the pilot that USAID developed as the basis for internal USAID consultations on the pilot (April 7), CoVE-MENA developed an options paper for the pilot that outlined five possible focus areas for the pilot's workshops/events and small grants (April 10). Following initial feedback from USAID, CoVE-MENA developed and submitted to USAID a concept note for an initial pilot event proposed for August 2015 (May 8), and the concept note was revised (May 11) based on the discussions during the quarterly review meeting with USAID. USAID then gave the green light to CoVE-MENA to proceed with planning for the event as input was being collected by USAID on the concept note.

*Pilot Workshop Planning:* On May 29<sup>th</sup>, CoVE-MENA submitted a draft workplan, participant selection criteria and a CSO matrix to USAID.

CoVE-MENA selected the Salam Institute for Peace and Justice, a leading expert on issues related to conflict resolution, nonviolence, human rights and development with a focus on bridging differences between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, to support the design and facilitation of the Maghreb/Sahel workshop. CoVE-MENA and the Salam Institute signed a Letter of Authorization (June 24) while a subcontract was in the process of being finalized.

As a resource partner on the CoVE-MENA task order, the Salam Institute was involved in early discussions on the overall framework and design of the workshop (June 1), based on which CoVE-MENA shared with USAID the proposed framework and objectives of the workshop (June 2). CoVE-MENA consulted with and received feedback on the general concept for the regional workshop from USIP (June 2), GCERF (June 3) and Hedayah (June 3). Based on these discussions, CoVE-MENA shared the first draft of the workshop agenda with USAID on June 17<sup>th</sup>, which was discussed in addition to other pilot-related issues during a meeting with USAID on June 18<sup>th</sup>. At this meeting, USAID gave initial approval on the draft agenda in order for CoVE-MENA to move forward with developing workshop sessions and materials.

*Participant Selection:* In order to determine a shortlist of CSOs that will be invited to submit statements of interest, CoVE-MENA considered CSOs that work in the target localities in each country on one or more of the programmatic areas of focus identified in the selection criteria. (see Box 1) CoVE-MENA selected a short list of 39 CSOs (from 234 CSOs identified) that was sent for USAID's review on June 18<sup>th</sup>. USAID circulated the list and will provide feedback on the shortlist for each country (Algeria, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Niger, and Tunisia).

#### **Box 1. Participant Selection Criteria**

1. Have experience operating in one or more of the target countries and localities.
2. Have community-level programmatic experience in one or more of target localities in one or more of the workshop's focus areas:
  - a. Youth participation and engagement.
  - b. Engaging families/mothers/schools around peacebuilding, conflict, or mitigating recruitment of youth by violent extremist groups
  - c. Promoting moderate messages and adult role models in vulnerable communities.
  - d. Promoting community resilience to conflict and violent extremism.
  - e. Addressing the needs and rehabilitation of returning fighters and/or radicalized former prisoners.
  - f. Improving community-security/police relations.
3. Express interest in building capacity to address community level response and resilience to violent extremism, contributing to project goals, and
4. Can meet all requirements included in the participant parameters.

Based on the complete feedback, CoVE-MENA will finalize the short list with USAID and request CSOs to submit statements of interest (Sol). In the meantime, CoVE-MENA drafted the Statement of Interest form and requested quotes from possible workshop venues in Morocco.

## **V. Challenges Faced this Quarter**

As demonstrated above, CoVE-MENA had a productive third quarter. The major challenge was one of convergent timing – as the training, pilot, and research components of CoVE-MENA all saw major developments in this quarter. The quarter was an opportunity for the team to coalesce, and we saw excellent group work and collaboration from all CoVE-MENA team members - FHI 360, SSG Advisors, Mercy Corps, and Salam Institute.

In addition, the initial design of the Maghreb/Sahel pilot had to be reconceived in light of the lack of Grants Under Contract authority. FHI 360 will work with USAID to see if GUC authority can be granted in the future but, if not, reprogramming of the \$900,000 in grants funds and related administrative costs may be considered.

## **VI. Plans for Next Quarter**

### **Management & Coordination**

It is anticipated that CoVE-MENA and USAID will meet for a quarterly meeting to kick off Q4 in early August. No changes to management or coordination are anticipated but a task order contract modification may be requested in order to reprogram the contract's grant funds.

### **Research Studies**

In Q4, we will finalize the first CoVE-MENA research product --a study on Women and VE in the Middle East. Based on USAID's feedback on the draft, we will finalize the report, and prepare to disseminate it at the upcoming UNGA Meeting and/or other relevant fora identified by USAID.

CoVE-MENA will also present additional research study topics to USAID for approval, with the aim of completing one by the end of calendar year 2015, and another in 2016. After consulting with USAID on their interest and relevance of the proposed topics, we will narrow down the list to 1-2 studies and begin working towards completing a second report this year.

During the upcoming quarter we expect to first develop and share a detailed research work plan for newly planned studies, consult with experts in relevant fields and recruit a lead PI, as needed, and work closely with USAID to ensure that we are able to deliver another high quality research product within a reasonable time frame.

### **Training and Knowledge Generation**

Early in Q4 CoVE-MENA provided USAID with a comprehensive Training Report that includes information regarding the training process and outputs from the CVE Training in June 2015 in

Nicosia, Cyprus.<sup>3</sup> From the training debrief and participant evaluations, CoVE-MENA is prepared to modify any or all training modules, or prepare others to meet USAID/ME's additional needs for field or DC-based CVE training.

In conjunction with the Maghreb-Sahel pilot workshop being held in September, CoVE-MENA will be creating an online CoP in order to share important resources as well as to allow for participants to continue the coordination and conversations established at the trainings. CoVE-MENA will be reaching out to the pilot training participants in advance of the trainings with a pre-workshop survey that will include questions regarding their preferred mode of online communication. The online CoP will be monitored and moderated by the CoVE-MENA project team and participants will be encouraged to engage in discussions surrounding CVE-related topics.

## **Pilot Activities**

CoVE-MENA's first activity under the Maghreb-Sahel pilot will be launched in Q4 with the "Participatory and Collaborative Approach to Countering Violent Extremism: Maghreb & Sahel Regional Workshop" that will be held on September 7 – 10, 2015, in Casablanca, Morocco for approximately 40 CSO participants from across the region. In preparation for the workshop, CoVE-MENA will continue working closely with the Salam Institute and coordinating with USAID on developing the sessions and material and making the logistical arrangements needed for the for a successful four-day workshop.

During the final day of the workshop, participants will be engaged in a discussion on capacity needs and next steps that will feed into CoVE-MENA's plan for follow-up activities within the pilot. As currently envisioned, by the end of the first workshop, participants will be engaged in the CoP that will continue to serve as a platform for continued discussions, information-sharing, and collaboration. CoVE-MENA will also provide additional support to participants that could include online capacity building sessions or trainings, individual short-term technical assistance and/or a follow up workshop focused on capacity building and meeting specific needs that have been identified in the period following the workshop.

In addition, CoVE-MENA will continue to generate and discuss ideas with USAID for additional pilots in other MENA sub-regions.

## **Annexes**

***Annex I: Workshop Report (Advancing the Development Response to Violent Extremism in MENA: USAID's Roles, Tools, and Options)***

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<sup>3</sup> Note: this report was delivered on July 6, 2015 – early in Q4 but before the publication of this Q3 Quarterly Performance Report.